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# No next assignment for this spy

BY POLK LAFFOON

Once during the conversation his hands seemed to shake. He was lighting his second or third cigarette, rather a lot for the short time he had been talking. The nervous edge was peculiar — it didn't jibe with the kind of image Victor Marchetti had painted of himself.

A real-life spy who came in from the cold, Marchetti is a 14-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency who has just authored a book called "The Rope Dancer." The novel purports to show espionage work for what it really is, as Marchetti experienced it. What he described, while dressing last Thursday morning, is hardly nerve-fraying.

"Not all spies are dashing, handsome, debonair," he said with anti-James Bond certainty. "The average spy is married and lives in the suburbs, belongs to the PTA, or is a scoutmaster." Marchetti was all of those things, and he indicated that his job was equally unextraordinary.

"I WORKED OUT of Washington, was permanently assigned to headquarters, and occasionally went on overseas assignments. For example, years ago we were interested in Soviet military aid, so I might go to Indonesia for as long as ten weeks, to try to get a better handle on what the Soviets were up to."

But most of the time, the ex-agent stressed, he was engaged in collating and interpreting vast supplies of information coming in from sources all over the globe. It was painstaking, arduous work, bureaucratic tedium that differed from corporate tedium only in that it dealt with national security instead of marketing strategy.

"The bulk of the information acquired today is through satellites, overhead sensors, and electronic sensors," Marchetti said, again subverting the martini-mistress mystique that permeates espionage literature. He added that much additional information comes through diplomatic and official channels, with newspapers and magazines providing most of the remainder.

FIDGETING RESTLESSLY, the aspiring writer smiled, and partially amended his de-romanticized "heresy."

"Maybe 10 per cent of all the people engaged in espionage work are back alley spies. But of these, 19 out of 20 are faking it under the cover of diplomacy. They try to acquire local agents in the country where they're working."

To the disillusionment of spy-novel aficionados everywhere, however, Marchetti emphasized that there are very, very few agents living overseas without cover, and that their contribution is of marginal value. "It's kind of like fishing — you throw them out and sooner or later you get a strike."

No clue to the speaker's own unease emerged as he discussed his idea for the book. "I was just sitting around talking with another agent. We were saying that things in the agency were so screwed up that it wouldn't be surprising to find that a Russian was running it. We meant it as a joke, of course, but that's where the book began."

WITH THE PUBLICATION of "The Rope Dancer," Marchetti terminated a long, distinguished career with the CIA. He was assistant to the director of the entire agency when he resigned, and prospects for the future were good. So why did he quit?

"I'd lost a great deal of faith in the agency and its policies. If I couldn't believe in it, I couldn't serve it," he said sounding more like a campus politician than a hardbitten "spy." In truth, Marchetti left for a variety of reasons, some of them intriguing for the insights they lend to the arcane workings of the CIA.

While hardly a dove, the disenchanted author feels government is spending far in excess of what it should for defense. He labels the \$59 billion poured into defense each year, and the

absurd with the problems at home. It's ridiculous to kill. We're like two guys standing across the street from each other with triggers on mortars, cannons, and rock. We don't need it," he said, looping his tie.

IN HIS VIEW, the same kind of thinking that led the arms buildup is reflected in the structure of the modern CIA. "It's too big, too costly, with too much military influence." Marchetti says the quality of the agency's product — good data — has been diluted accordingly. "We need more control from within the organization, and more directly from the outside."

Separately, Marchetti condemns the "cold war mentality" that colors much of the CIA's thinking, and translates to poor estimates of the international situation. "Cuba is the perfect example," he said eagerly, recounting the misguided thinking that led the U.S. to back Batista against Castro under the mistaken assumption that most Cubans also were anti-Castro.

Then, he says, when Castro won after all, the U.S. labeled him a Marxist and forced him into Russia's embrace. "That's what's wrong with Vietnam and Laos today," Marchetti continues, "we're trying to support governments not representative of the people."

ALMOST TO THE end of his reasons for resigning from the CIA, the cheerful novelist finished dressing, and readied himself to face anew the rigorous publicity tour. And still he eluded any indication of why he seemed slightly edgy.

"I disliked the clandestine atmosphere one finds in an organization like the CIA," he said, finalizing the list. "What bothers me most is when some guys get restless in the CIA and military intelligence a few years ago. With groups like the SDS, the Black Panthers, and with civil unrest in general, people in the CIA began to wonder what they should do about it."

Drawing on yet another cigarette, Marchetti explained that such internal disorders are properly the job of the FBI or the army, not the CIA. Nevertheless, vociferous minority of the agents — the "spooks" — he calls them — began to say, "We're the experts. We should do the work."

THIS RATIONALE could lead to trouble at home as it already has in numerous small countries pockmarked by CIA interference. Marchetti disliked the trendline, and resigned.

Gathering papers together to go meet his putative local representative, he mentioned that he was that he no longer is associated with an outfit involved in the conduct of the Vietnam war. He feels comfortable as he talks with his 17-year-old son, almost of the age to fight the war, and a hearty disbeliever in it.

His clean conscience has been tempered by budgetary regrets, however. "I had to tell my son he wanted to go on to college, he'd have to manage the way I did, by working his way through." Marchetti regrets that he has to be careful in acquiescing to his wife's requests for new living room furniture.

The problem is that in leaving the CIA, and a high position within it, Marchetti was exercising an uncommon idea — at least uncommon in 41-year-olds with a wife and three children. He left a \$23,000-a-year job, with promise of substantially more soon, for the vagaries known of a writer's life.

Marchetti is morally at peace with MORICOR, precisely the key to his restlessness. He has a second novel in the works, and a possible movie contract. And that??? He is a spy without his next assignment.